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EVALUATION OF THE THRESHOLD PROGRAM AT LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE. SECOND REPORT.

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DURING A THREE-SEMESTER PERIOD, STUDENTS WITH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE ABILITY TEST (SCAT) SCORES BELOW THE 17TH PERCENTITLE WERE ENROLLED ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS IN SPECIAL CLASSES IN ENGLISH, SPEECH, AND PSYCHOLOGY, PLUS ONE ELECTIVE. CONTROL GROUPS FOR COMPARISON WERE SELECTED RANDOMLY FROM OTHER STUDENTS IN THE SAME SCAT GROUP. MORALE IN THESE "THRESHOLD" CLASSES HAS BEEN REPORTED AS EXCELLENT, THOUGH SOME STUDENTS HAVE SHOWN PATTERNS OF EXCESSIVE ABSENCE. STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS DO NOT SHOW SIGNIFICANT GAINS, BUT THE AUTHOR NOTES THAT THESE DO NOT VALIDLY MEASURE ACHIEVEMENT OF COURSE OBJECTIVES INVOLVED. BY THE BEGINNING OF THE FOURTH SEMESTER AFTER ENTRANCE, 11.7 PERCENT OF THE "THRESHOLD" GROUP AND 6.5 PERCENT OF THE CONTROL GROUP WERE STILL IN SCHOOL. RELATIVELY FEW OF THE STUDY OR CONTROL ACHIEVED A 2.0 GRADE POINT AVERAGE. STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH THE PROGRAM SEEMS GENERALLY HIGH. MOST WHO COMPLETED THE SEMESTER DID NOT CHANGE THEIR OBJECTIVES, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THOSE WHO DROPPED FROM THE PROGRAM MAY HAVE REEVALUATED THEIR GOALS IN A REALISTIC MANER. THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES THAT, SINCE ONLY A FEW OF THESE STUDENTS REMAIN IN SCHOOL THREE OR MORE SEMESTERS, THE COLLEGE MUST RECOGNIZE AND SERVE THEIR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS WHILE THEY ARE IN SCHOOL. (WO)

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LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

EVALUATION OF THE THRESHOLD PROGRAM

AT LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

SECOND REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIF.
LOS ANGELES

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Fred Machetanz

October 5, 1966

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SECOND REPORT

Introduction

The threshold program was started at Los Angeles Valley College in the Spring semester, 1965, with a group of 35 students. New threshold classes have been started each semester since the initial group. For the fall semester, 1966, 103 students were programmed into three threshold sections.

It was the aim of this program to provide a more effective education for low academic ability and educationally disadvantaged students. In addition, it was believed that the efficiency of instruction in regular classes would be increased by the removal of those students unable to succeed in regular courses.

Purpose

It would seem important that every instructional program be evaluated in some way. Especially important is the evaluation of new experimental programs such as the threshold program. It is to be expected that new programs will be received with mixed feelings.* Information is needed to answer the many questions which arise in connection with this program. Sound decisions for continuing or improving the program may best be made on the basis of data obtained from several sources including the students and instructors involved in the program.

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*See appendix A for some expressed feelings about the threshold program.

Statement of the Problem

The threshold program has been in existence at Valley College for three semesters. This study attempts to provide information relative to the question, "To what extent does the threshold program provide an effective education for students of low academic ability?"

Method of Study

To evaluate the effectiveness of education for threshold students the following techniques have been used:

1. Administration of paralleled forms of standardized achievement tests at the beginning and end of the initial semester.
2. Administration of a questionnaire to students in the threshold program which sampled their reaction to the program and provided some information about threshold student characteristics.
3. Comparison of academic achievement and persistence of attendance of threshold classes with control groups selected randomly each semester from the students scoring below the 17th centile on the total scale of the SCAT. The Cohort Survival technique was used for showing the persistence of attendance.

Related Information

Much has been written about programs for low ability and educationally disadvantaged students in the past three years.

Powell at Los Angeles City has written articulately (2) about the bases for the establishment for special programs and Young and Gold,

Los Angeles City, have provided several outstanding papers on the characteristics and successes of the low ability student (4).

Threshold Classes

Typically, those students selected for the threshold program enroll in three basic classes, English, Speech and Psychology. In addition, threshold students may take one non-solid elective. For the fall semester, 1966, the basic psychology class previously offered was divided into an orientation class, Psychology 9, and a reading improvement class, Psychology 21.

The ratio of males to females in threshold classes has been about four to three. While morale in the classes has been reported as excellent, some threshold students have shown patterns of excessive absence.

Outside Work

During the spring semester, 1966, slightly over 50% of the threshold students reported outside jobs. Although some worked over 40 hours per week, the average work load, of those working, was 25 hours per week. Typical jobs mentioned were filling station attendant, box boy, and sales girl.

Findings..

Information provided by extensive testing has shown that the threshold student is seriously handicapped in classes requiring verbal skills. As reported in an earlier paper (1), no significant gains

were noted in "before and after" standardized achievement testing. It should be observed that the standardized achievement tests do not validly measure knowledge of course objectives and hence are probably not appropriate for measuring change in knowledge of course content.

The following tables provide some information about the threshold student - first from the objective standpoint of his survival in college and his academic achievement, and second from the standpoint of his subjective appraisal of the program.

Table I	A Cohort Survival Comparison of Threshold and Control Groups with Respect to Class Enrollment and Class Completion
Table II	Probationary Status of Threshold Students currently attending (Fall, 1966)
Table III	A Comparison of Threshold and Control Groups with Respect to Academic Achievement
Table IV	A Summary of Questionnaire Given to Students in the Threshold Program, Spring, 1966
Table V	Suggestions to Improve Threshold Program
Table VI	Feelings Expressed About Threshold Program

TABLE I

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

A COHORT SURVIVAL COMPARISON OF THRESHOLD AND CONTROL GROUPS
WITH RESPECT TO CLASS ENROLLMENT AND CLASS COMPLETION

		Spring 1965		Fall 1965		Spring 1966		Fall 1966
		Enrolled	Completed	Enrolled	Completed	Enrolled	Completed	Currently Attending
Class I Spring 1965	THRESH.	35 (100%	32 (91.5%)	24 (68.5%)	17 (48%)	17 (48.5%)	12 (34.3%)	4 (11.4%)
	CONTROL	61 (100%)	35 (57.4%)	30 (49.2)	21 (34.4%)	18 (29.5%)	12 (19.7%)	4 (6.5%)
Class II Fall 1965	THRESH.			59 (100%)	47 (79.5%)	38 (64.4%)	28 (47.4%)	15 (25.4%)
	CONTROL			57 (100%)	46 (80.6%)	39 (68.4%)	28 (49.2%)	15 (26.3%)
Class III Spring 1966	THRESH.					55 (100%)	44 (80.0%)	22 (40.0%)
	CONTROL					51 (100%)	31 (60.7%)	18 (35.3%)

TABLE II

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

Probationary Status of Threshold Students
Currently Attending (Fall, 1966)

		Number Currently Attending	Number Currently Attending on Probation
Class I Spring 1965			
	Threshold	4	4 (100%)*
	Control	4	3 (75%)
Class II Fall 1965			
	Threshold	15	11 (73%)
	Control	15	6 (40%)
Class III Spring 1966			
	Threshold	22	18 (82%)
	Control	18	13 (72%)

* % of those attending who are on probation

TABLE III

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

A COMPARISON OF THRESHOLD AND CONTROL GROUPS
WITH RESPECT TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

		Spring '65			Fall '65			Spring '66		
Class I Spring 1965	THRESH	Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%
		2.00	6	17	2.00	5	21	2.00	5	29
		1.00-1.99	22	63	1.00-1.99	9	37	1.00-1.99	5	29
		.00-0.99	4	11	.00-0.99	3	13	.00-0.99	2	13
		W	3	9	W	7	29	W	5	29
			35			24			17	
	CONTROL	Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%
		2.00	10	16	2.00	8	27	2.00	3	17
		1.00-1.99	16	26	1.00-1.99	5	16	1.00-1.99	4	22
		.00-0.99	9	15	.00-0.99	8	27	.00-0.99	5	28
		W	26	43	W	9	30	W	6	33
			61			30			18	
Class II Fall 1965	THRESH				Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%
					2.00	19	32	2.00	6	16
					1.00-1.99	21	36	1.00-1.99	11	29
					.00-0.99	7	12	.00-0.99	11	29
					W	12	20	W	10	26
						59			38	
	CONTROL				Interval	f	%	Interval	f	%
					2.00	10	18	2.00	9	23
					1.00-1.99	26	45	1.00-1.99	13	33
					.00-0.99	10	18	.00-0.99	6	15
					W	11	19	W	11	29
						57			39	
Class III Spring 1966	THRESH							Interval	f	%
								2.00	9	16
								1.00-1.99	18	33
								.00-0.99	17	31
								W	11	20
									55	
	CONTROL							Interval	f	%
								2.00	5	10
								1.00-1.99	13	25
								.00-0.99	13	25
								W	20	40
									51	

TABLE IV

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

A SUMMARY OF QUESTIONNAIRES GIVEN
TO STUDENTS IN THRESHOLD PROGRAM, SPRING, 1966

	Yes		No		Total
	n	%	n	%	
1. If you had it to do over, would you sign up for this program?	27	75	9	25	36
2. Has this program helped you in your relationships with other people?	26	70	11	30	37
3. Do you know more about yourself as a result of this program?	31	84	6	16	37
4. Have you decided about the job in which you would like to work?	26	68	12	32	38
5. Have your job plans changed because of this program?	6	16	32	84	38
6. Have your educational plans changed as a result of thhs program?	13	36	23	64	36
7. Do you like college work?	34	92	3	8	37

	No Improvement		Some Improvement		Much Improvement	
	n	%	n	%		
8. Indicate how you have improved in each of the following areas:						
Reading	4	11	22	59	11	30
Speaking	3	8	16	43	18	49
Writing	2	5	18	49	17	46

TABLE V

LOS ANGELES VALLEY COLLEGE

SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE THRESHOLD PROGRAM

The following statements were made by students in answer to the question, "What suggestions would you have to improve this program?" Comments are shown as written.

1. Have a little more patience with the students, even though some are not trying, some are.

2. Another class added. Adding of a math class. So many people need help in math.

3. By being more patient for the students who are late coming to class.

4. Not to have a speech every day.

5. More of the spelling. Not so much of the Junior High stuff. More College things.

6. More book reports, some oral. More spelling tests, start from the beginning of the semester.

7. By changing the students so every class would have different people, giving difference of educational level and more incentive.

8. More learning to write.

TABLE VI

FEELINGS EXPRESSED ABOUT THRESHOLD PROGRAM

The following comments were made in answer to the question, "How do you feel about the program?"

1. All I can say is I learn a lot of things I didn't know or maybe I just started studying more and more.

2. It is very helpful and it hleps one's speaking, reading and writing capability. I feel it really helped a person towards their other classes throughout college.

3. It is a tremendous help for those who have frequent errors in English. And it offers a better understanding between people and their actions. I have also received an enormous amount of satisfaction in speaking and offering my opinions.

4. You went over so many things that we already knew.

5. I feel that I have learned a lot that I did not learn in High School.

6. This is a very good program because it teaches you some of the basic plans for study, which you may have forgotten or just never learned because of lack of study skills.

7. I feel it has helped improve my studies a lot.

8. I think it is good because it has helped me a great deal.

9. This program is very helpful if a person really wants to learn.

10. I feel it should be recommended to each new student at Valley. For I think it would give them the extra help they may need in English, before going on to any other English class.

11. I think this program is wonderful. I am so glad I took this class, because now I am sure of my grammar, and I am not afraid of writing compositions.

12. It is quite helpful as a refresher to the student who forgot.

Comments

It should be observed that there are many variables involved in the evaluation of any instructional program. Measurement devices are inadequate, objectives are nebulous, and so called objective data are unreliable. Only the most tentative generalizations are justified. Validation of a program may take years. In spite of the above, it is hoped that the data obtained will provide some guides to future planning and decision making.

1) Table I shows the number of threshold students who started in the Spring '65, Fall '65, and Spring '66 semesters, and follows through to the number currently attending. With each of the threshold groups is included a control group which is matched with respect to entering SCAT score. It is noted in Table I that at the beginning of the 4th semester only about 10% of the original threshold and control group students were still attending.

2) Table II shows the number and per cent of threshold and control group students now on probation. It is observed that many students from both groups went on probation each semester. Because only a few of these educationally disadvantaged students remain three semesters or longer, it seems important that the school recognize their educational needs while they are here.

3) Table III indicates that relatively few of the students scoring below the 17th centile on the total scale of the SCAT achieved a "C" or better grade average during any given semester. This would appear to indicate that there is no lowering of grading standards by members of the threshold faculty.

4) Table IV shows that, as in previous semesters, most threshold students indicated that they would enroll in the threshold program again if they were starting. It also seems that most students who completed the semester did not change their vocational or educational goals as a result of their experience in the threshold program. This may be somewhat deceptive in that those students who dropped may have changed their objectives in a realistic manner.

5) Tables V and VI are self-explanatory and reflect feelings and opinions similar to those expressed by threshold classes in the previous two semesters. It is noteworthy that most students in the program have very positive feelings toward it.

6) An analysis was made of those students achieving a "C" or better average during their first semester after the semester of entrance into the threshold program. Two factors which appear to be involved in the success of those students are as follows:

a) The student enrolled in a reduced number of units;

b) The student enrolled in one or more of the follow- classes - Health 10; Secretarial Science 2, 10, 11, and 30; Office Machines 1 and 2; Business 32; Psychology 20; Sociology 12; Business 38 and Merchandising 1.

7) It should be noted that there may be considerable differences among threshold classes and among grading standards for individual instructors. For example, success ratios* as high as 59% and as low as 23% were noted.

* The success ratio index is defined as the total number of final grades above a "D" divided by the beginning enrollment times 100.

SUMMARY

This report is the second done in a follow-up evaluation of the threshold program at Valley College. Its purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of the program for the education of low ability students.

Subjectively, the threshold students feel that they are benefiting from the program. The morale is reported as high by both threshold instructors and students. There does not appear to be a consistent advantage of the threshold student over the control groups with the respect persistance of attendance or attained grade point average. It is apparent that there are many variables involved in the evaluation of this program and further follow-up study is recommended. In conclusion it is suggested for the future that the objectives for threshold classes be set down in specific behavioral terms so that evaluation of academic gains by threshold students may be objectively validated.

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APPENDIX A

SOME OPINIONS EXPRESSED
ABOUT THE THRESHOLD PROGRAM

PRO	CON
1. The threshold program will increase the effectiveness of education for low ability students.	1. Low ability students who have not profited from a school situation so far have small probability of achieving now.
2. The threshold program would allow regular transfer classes to cover more content at greater depth.	2. The threshold classes represent the first step in turning the junior college into a remedial school with its consequent reduction in status for the junior college.
3. Threshold classes would reduce the high drop-out rate of low ability students.	3. No objective evidence of improvement in basic skills is seen in studies of low ability students done throughout the state.
4. The threshold program would reduce the maladjustment of low ability students in regular college transfer courses.	4. Subjective success on the part of the student in a low ability program is dependent upon the orientation of the teacher involved.
5. The threshold program would provide more adequate education for life in the community for low ability students.	5. Grading in threshold classes tends to dilute the academic standards of the junior college.
6. The state law requires that all students who can profit from education be admitted to classes in the junior college.	6. Junior college is the wrong place to start remedial work and should be instituted at another level such as the adult schools.
7. There are pressures throughout the state for the junior college to institute special classes for low ability students.	7. It is questionable whether low ability students actually profit from instruction in the junior college.
8. Low ability students feel that the program is a good thing if the instructor is with them and talking to them instead of over their heads as is their case in regular classes.	8. The threshold program works against the best interests of the Master Plan.
9. There is an esprit de corps in threshold classes which is beneficial to low ability students.	9. The presence of the few low ability students in regular classes does not affect the quality of instruction.
10. A high ability student will not find a student who has been in Special Training classes throughout high school suddenly sitting next to him in a junior college class.	10. By retaining the low ability student in junior college classes we are cruelly postponing the inevitable.
11. Threshold caliber students are admitted to the junior college and it is important to recognize their presence and do something about it.	11. Low ability students should take classes which directly improve their vocational skills.
12. The coordinating counsel has indicated that the junior college has the responsibility to provide education for the educationally disadvantaged student.	